

CLOSED STACKS

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HOUSING AND
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One of the considerations that led to the development of the low-rent housing and slum clearance program administered by local housing agencies with the aid of the United States Housing Authority.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY flourishes in the shadow of the slums. Despite the fact that the great majority of slum-dwellers are decent, law-abiding citizens whose low incomes keep them from living in better homes, studies made over the past few years have repeatedly shown that the areas of high delinquency rates are almost always the areas of bad housing.

In one Chicago slum area, one out of every four boys between the ages of 10 and 17 passed through the juvenile court in one year. The delinquency rate in Hartford slums was found to be twice as high as in the rest of the city and in Cleveland the rate was three times as high.

Statistics in city after city tell a surprisingly similar story:

City	Percent of city area	Percent of juvenile population	Percent of juvenile delinquency
Philadelphia.	9.4	25.1	46
Richmond...	18.8	31.0	50
Birmingham.	12.1	12.2	25
Denver.....	5.7	11.0	25
Seattle.....	6.3	11.2	25

Local governments had long suspected that this close relation existed, even before there was such a substantial array of facts and figures to prove it. They had noted that, in case after case, the young delinquents with whom they had to deal came from overcrowded, dilapidated dwellings in miserable neighborhoods. And they had viewed with dismay the enormous drain upon local treasuries every year for juvenile courts and settlement houses, for social workers and police, for reformatories and jails.

It is, of course, possible to oversimplify the causes of delinquency. Poverty is usually an urgent factor, and poor health is another link in the long chain of environmental and hereditary forces. But there is no escaping the significance of conditions that surround people in their homes. They make for happiness or lead to desperation.



While it was obvious that wiping out slums and building good homes in decent environments for low-income families offered at least a partial solution to many of the problems that faced them, the localities were powerless, single-handed, to undertake such constructive measures.

In 1937 Congress responded to the pleas of communities all over the country for assistance in carrying out local slum clearance and rehousing programs. The United States Housing Authority was established to make loans for public housing

projects and to make annual contributions toward getting rents so low that families in the lowest income group could pay them. Provision was also made for technical aid to local authorities to insure good planning and economical construction. Only low-income families now living in substandard housing may live in projects built with USHA aid, and decent occupancy standards are prescribed. For every new dwelling built in a project, at least one substandard dwelling must be eliminated.

In order to understand fully why better housing means better, happier, and more normal citizens, it is well to examine just what it is about slum homes that makes it easier for young people to go wrong.

There is one characteristic most slum homes have in common—congestion. Sheer lack of space may drive children out of their dirty, squalid dwellings. When neighborhoods are also congested and lack play space, the children overflow onto sidewalks and streets and into alleys, away from parental supervision. The play groups that spring up in the slums are usually large and unrestrained. At the very period in life when imitative habit formations and intellectual attitudes are being crystallized, the rowdies of the slums are apt to lead and to be mimicked by the other children.

We have not always recognized the importance of preschool years and out-of-school hours. Not until children are 6 years old do our communities actively concern themselves with their training. Yet young minds and bodies do not grow in a vacuum. It is remarkable how fully modern psychology bears out the implication of the old Jesuit maxim: "Give us complete control of the child up to its seventh year, and you may have it thereafter."

Most delinquents begin by being truants. Group activities may range from simple "smut sessions" and disturbing the peace to more serious offenses. They may, as one youngster nonchalantly put it, "go robbin' mostly." When a play group develops into a delinquent gang because youthful energies have not been properly guided, it may be the push-

cart on the corner or the neighborhood grocery that is singled out for a raid. Vandalism is also a leading activity.

Sooner or later these delinquent activities excite disapproval or opposition. A group consciousness then builds up, and "cops" become the gang's natural enemies. Today's delinquents often turn out to be tomorrow's crooks and gangsters. The National Probation Association estimates that no less than 85 percent of all criminals began their delinquent behavior as youngsters.

As the child of the slums grows older, he almost invariably tries to escape his sordid environment.



In the drive to rise above it, his response to the complex industrial life about him may easily be a delinquent one, particularly if such tendencies have already been acquired.

From birth in squalid homes, to kindergarten in the slums, then graduation into hardened delinquents or big-time criminals—this is the path too many slum-dwellers have trod. We have built the biggest penitentiaries in the world to house them, after they have gone wrong.

Much of the time, actual presence within the home can be avoided, but the time comes when the child must return to eat and sleep. In slum homes it is not uncommon to find three or four adults sleeping in one room, or growing children sharing bedrooms with adults. Adolescent boys and girls

often share the same bedroom, sometimes even the same bed. Under such circumstances, privacy is impossible, and immorality may develop.

In Washington, D. C., it was found that more than 72 percent of all juvenile probationers came from crowded or congested dwellings.

Respectable families may crowd their homes with criminals or other undesirables to help pay the rent. Or they may live in overcrowded or unsatisfactory dwellings because of racial barriers or landlords' refusals to rent to families with children.

When homes lack room for entertaining, young people arrange to meet their friends on street corners or in alleys. Conditions that make it undesirable to stay at home and equally undesirable to go outside the home produce a vicious cycle detrimental to the welfare of a large portion of the Nation's future citizens.

Local governments spend millions of dollars every year in fighting the evil consequences of slums. In Cleveland a study sponsored by the city government in 1934 found that the cost of police protection alone in one large slum area averaged \$11.50 per person, as compared with an average of \$4.20 per person for the rest of the city.

In 1935 a study made by the Mayor's Committee of Hartford, Conn., showed that the city was spending five and one-half percent of its entire budget for law enforcement and other services in a district comprising only one percent of its area.

It costs money to maintain truant officers, social workers, police, reform schools, and jails. If the necessity for these services can be reduced to a minimum through the provision of decent homes in place of slums, local governments save money.

More than 200 local authorities in large localities and small, from coast to coast, are already planning, constructing, or actually operating USHA-assisted projects. Families with the greatest number of children are given preference for the various dwellings, provided overcrowding does not result.

Adequate play facilities, indoors and out, are

being provided for the children, so that healthy and happy young lives, rather than delinquent ones, will be encouraged. Facilities for recreation and for social and educational activities for adults are also being included in the projects.

A new and better way of life has already been opened to thousands of individuals from substan-



dard environments. Under the immediate program, hundreds of thousands of slum-dwellers throughout the Nation will move into modern low-rent dwellings in projects that instill pride and contentment rather than misery and revolt.

Intelligent and far-sighted citizens are continuing to rally to the support of local housing programs. For while they realize that good housing cannot completely control environment or delinquency, they are convinced that erasing the Nation's slums is a social investment that will pay dividends in human as well as economic values.

This leaflet is one of a series on various phases of the United States Housing Authority program. For additional copies of this leaflet, or for copies of others in this series, write to the

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